



**60. INTERNATIONAL BERLIN FILM FESTIVAL
GOLDEN BEAR AWARD**

ON APRIL 9th IN THEATERS

a SEMİH KAPLANOĞLU film

PRODUCER Semih Kaplanoğlu

CO-PRODUCERS Johannes Rexin, Bettina Brokemper

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER Alexander Bohr

SCRIPT Semih Kaplanoğlu – Orçun Köksal

EDITING Ayhan Ergürsel - Semih Kaplanoğlu- Suzan Hande Güneri

ART DIRECTOR Naz Erayda DIRECTOR of PHOTOGRAPHY Barış Özbiçer

SOUND RECORD Matthias Haeb MIXING Tobias Fleig BFVT VDT

PRODUCTION MANAGER Aksel Kamber DISTRIBUTION Cinefilm

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“Touching, truthful and overpoweringly charming” FINANCIAL TIMES

“Bal, captures the thrill of true romance.” THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

**“Golden Bear, is the biggest triumph of Turkey’s new cinema”
FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE**

BAL / SYNOPSIS

Yusuf (6) has started primary school and is learning how to read and write. His father, Yakup (35-38), works far in the depths of a frightening forest. He is a honey-gatherer who hangs his hand-made beehives in the upper branches of tall trees in the forest. The forest is a place of mystery for Yusuf, who often accompanies his father. One morning Yusuf describes the dream he had seen that night to his father. This dream is to be an ever-lasting secret between the father and the son.

On that same day, as Yusuf struggles to read before his entire classmates the text the teacher has given him, he begins suddenly to stutter and is ridiculed by his classmates.

Yakup goes to a distant forest, looking for the Caucasian bees which seem to be quickly and mysteriously disappearing. His father gone, Yusuf slips into silence. Yusuf’s mother, Zehra (28), who works in the tea fields, is saddened to see her son in this state. No matter how much she tries, she cannot get her son to speak.

Days pass and Zehra and Yusuf becomes anxious when Yakup does not return. Zehra sends Yusuf to spend the sacred Mirac Night (the night of the Ascension of the Prophet) with his grandmother, who lives quite a distance away from their village. There, Yusuf listens to the story of the Mirac, and believes that his father, who to the lad resembles the Holy Prophet, will return.

The next day they fail to find Yakup at the festival being held on Sis (mist) Mountain.

Yusuf goes deep into the forest to search for his father. Will the dream he has seen come true?

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COMMENTS FROM WRITER-DIRECTOR SEMIH KAPLANOGLU

THE YUSUF TRILOGY

BAL is the third film in my "Yusuf Trilogy." The idea of the "Yusuf Trilogy" took form while I was revising a script which I had written long ago and which was more or less the story of university aged Yusuf in SÜT/MILK. While I was elaborating on the character of Yusuf, I started to think about this young man's future as an adult (YUMURTA/EGG) and his past as a young boy (BAL/HONEY). Those ideas helped shape the trilogy. I started with YUMURTA/EGG, maybe because I wanted to peel down the character slowly and reach his core. The trilogy could be considered an extensive flashback. However, they are not period films. All take place in the present day amidst various places, relations and economic standards in Turkey. I have been asked if all three Yusuf characters are indeed the same man. I choose not to answer so as not to disclose the secrets of the character,

the direct and indirect relationship between the films, the mysteries to the films.

MY OWN PAST EXPERIENCES

I drew on my own past experiences while shaping the character of Yusuf. So we can say that Yusuf has parts from me. I referred to my own youth and childhood while writing the three scripts and I believe I was able to handle the issues about Yusuf's life, troubles and quests realistically. My own childhood served as a point of reference for the script of BAL/HONEY as well. My troubles at school while trying to learn how to read and write, my questions which grownups left unanswered, the intense cruelty and richness of nature... In a way, a child forms his personality while discovering the world with curiosity. An occasional misunderstanding leading to naïve mistakes, dreams, joys and sorrows allows him to reach the truth. I hope BAL/HONEY allows us to reach the truth of Yusuf.

NO ORDINARY PLACE

For Yusuf and his father Yakup, the forest represents a fairytale place containing many mysteries at its heart. The forest is a magical realm into which they vanish and appear back again. It is no ordinary place where they walk to and from for a means of livelihood. It constitutes another world with big old trees, various mysterious creatures, like the mule and the hawk which accompanies them into the forest. It was quite difficult to find a place where there were broad and tall trees with big trunks. I tried my best to find a location both suitable for placing the hives and the visual world that I wanted to create in BAL/HONEY. We worked in various forests, particularly in those where beehives have been placed for centuries. They were located 30-40 km from each other and at different heights way above sea level, and they all feature many different kinds of trees.

YAKUP THE BEEKEEPER

Yusuf's father Yakup is a beekeeper who gathers black hive honey, considered some of the world's finest honey and specific to the region. This therapeutic honey is the essence of an older world, untouched nature and holiest knowledge for the inhabitants of the region. It is produced by a dwindling number of beekeepers. Yakup's occupation will soon die out. This tough labor includes placing specially-made hives on tall treetops in mountainous areas. This profession is as dangerous as it is grueling. Yusuf's admiration of his father certainly owes something to his unconventional job. In my point of view, it has something in common with Yusuf's future vocation -- poetry.

THE ABSENCE OF FATHER

We cannot say there is no father figure for Yusuf in the Yusuf Trilogy, since we clearly see in BAL/HONEY that he lives with and has a strong relationship with his father. The point is how Yusuf experiences the later absence of his father, how he makes up for the absence in a way. From a psychoanalytical point of view, the early loss of his father might have led Yusuf to develop his relationship with authority through his mother i.e. SÜT/MILK. Maybe this is the underlying reason into his fragility, introversion and undecidedness and eventual rediscovery i.e. YUMURTA/EGG. But all these are matters of psychology which I don't take heed of in my stories. I'm trying to portray and reflect on the situation on a more spiritual level. Rather than dissecting our existence in the laboratory of psychology and confine life into cause and effect relationships, I'm trying to refer to some greater power. I'd like for and hope that the Yusuf Trilogy analyzed from the perspective of the Prophet Yakup and the Prophet Yusuf with the guidance of dreams also from the perspective of hope-fear. The whole picture will then be complete.

SHOOTING NEAR THE BLACK SEA COAST

BAL/HONEY was shot in and around the small town of Çamlıhemşin. It is in the Rize Province along the Black Sea coast of northeast Turkey. The reason behind my choice of this region is its nature. This was the only region featuring the kind of forests I was

looking for. However, the geographical conditions of the region gave us hard times during the shoot, especially during the forest shoots. We could only go up to a certain point by car, and then we had to get off and hike with the equipment to reach the shooting location which was quite far away. Filming was done in a steep place where one could hardly stand. The Black Sea coast also has very unpredictable weather. Rain, sun and fog can often be experienced within the same hour. So we had a difficult time with continuity of the scenes. When I look through my journal, I see that it rained 39 out of 48 days.

THE CHILDHOOD OF HUMANITY

If we were to define modern times as the adulthood of humanity, then I can say that the locations where BAL/HONEY was shot are still experiencing the childhood of humanity. We worked in mountain villages which will soon be deserted by people who are still trying to live by ancient tradition and under conditions and rules set down by nature. In such places, we are witnessing the destruction of natural water resources for the sake of building thermal power plants. This is a problem that must be addressed as soon as possible.

YUSUF'S STUTTER

Having just started school, Yusuf is learning to read and write. When he is alone with his dad he is able to read, slowly pronouncing everything. But in the schoolroom, he gets overexcited and stutters. When his friends tease him, he retreats into silence and loneliness. Just as recent high school graduate Yusuf isn't admitted to military service in SÜT/MILK, the moment he cannot read out loud in front of his classmates in BAL/HONEY is a breaking point for Yusuf as a boy. Receiving a badge for successfully reading out loud is of great importance for a first grader. Failing and being the laughing stock of his classmates leads Yusuf to retreat into himself and he will develop a strong relationship with words and poetry.

THE SEARCH FOR YOUNG YUSUF

We searched for the right Yusuf in various cities, towns and villages in the region for months. We went to all of the elementary schools and interviewed first graders. I was looking for the young version of Yusuf in YUMURTA/EGG and SÜT/MILK. I wasn't convinced by any of the hundreds of boys that we met. After two months of searching, I decided to change the location. It was a risky decision. All the work done by my assistants and casting people would go out of the window, like the many other children cast in secondary roles. We moved to a new place 100 km away from our previous location and started working there. There were few residents left, and mostly old people, due to unemployment and migration. Few kids remaining were not promising either. One day, on my way back from a location scout, I saw Bora Altas riding his bicycle. I got out of the car and introduced myself. I immediately felt that he was the Yusuf that I had been looking for. He was a sensitive, smart child with a world of his own.

TRANSFORMING BORA INTO YUSUF

During the filming of BAL/HONEY, Bora Altas was seven. Bora has a very different character than the Yusuf which I had written. Bora is very sociable. I couldn't afford to leave him the way he is. Bora would have to act. It was hard to get Yusuf out of him. We worked hard and were patient. I explained Yusuf to him scene by scene as much as I could. We developed a bond based on trust. I can say that I worked with him the way I work with adult actors. Bora was courageous enough to submit himself to me and I never abused the trust and admiration I held for him. I have learned a lot trying to make such a young child concentrate on his role. As I don't have child, I have no experience with children. I can never forget Bora and the other children's enthusiasm and commitment. I'd like to acknowledge the help of actress Tülin Özen and child acting coach Kutay Sandıkcı in assisting me to get the best performances out of these children.

SPIRITUAL REALISM

I have experienced and learned many things over the past four years during pre-production, production and editing of the three films in the Yusuf Trilogy. It has also served as a process where I tried to shape my filmmaking style, which I tentatively call "spiritual realism".

During this period, I questioned not only the cinematographic elements such as visual imagery, actors, sound, location and time, but also the technical crew, financial resources and the way I find and spend them, and I certainly learned some lessons. Making a film is like discovering, even defining, one's self through the mirror of that film. Not just for the director, but for everybody in the crew. For instance, when my mother - who played small roles in YUMURTA/EGG and SÜT/MILK - saw the house in YUMURTA/EGG, she told me it looked very much like our old house where I spent my childhood. This inspired her to tell me many details that we had never talked about before, family stories that I never knew. I later used some of them in SÜT/MILK and BAL/HONEY.

BAL / CAST

BORA ALTAŞ He was born in Izmir – Konak in 13.08.2002 as the firstborn of a family from Rize. His father is a pensioner and his mother is a housewife. He started schooling in Izmir. After he completed form one they moved to his father's hometown Rize – Çamlıhemşin with his family. They are still living there and Bora is attending form two there. He has a 3-year-old younger brother, Gökdeniz.

ERDAL BEŞİKÇİOĞLU Born in 1970 Beşikçioğlu, has a degree in theater from Hacettepe University State Conservatory. He studied creative drama with William Guskill. His feature films : 2009 Bal - Semih Kaplanoğlu, 2008 Vali - Çağatay Tosun, 2008 Hayat Var - Reha Erdem, 2007 Barda - Serdar Akar, 2006 Eve Giden Yol - Semir Aslanyürek. His sitcoms: 2009 Ayrılık - Metin Balekoğlu, 2009 Es.Es. - Bahadır İnce, 2006 Köprü - Sadullah Şentürk, 2005 Seni Çok Özledim - Delik Gökçin, 2005 Ödünç Hayat - Nihat Durak, 2004 Kasırga İnsanları - Nihat Durak.

TÜLİN ÖZEN She was born in İskenderun-Hatay in 1979. Graduated from Yeditepe University Acting School, she worked in state theater as well as private ones as actor, translator and assistant director. She was awarded Golden Orange for the Best Actress with her role in Angel's Fall (2004). The same role brought her The Promising Actress award in Ankara Film Festival and The Best Actress Award in Nürnberg Film Festival. She was awarded the Best Supporting Actress for her role in Vicdan by Siyad, Sadri Alışık Awards and Adana Altın Koza Film

Festival. Özen is currently playing in Kapalıçarşı, a popular Turkish sitcom. Her feature Films: 2010 Bal (Honey) – Semih Kaplanoğlu (actor), 2008 Vicdan – Erden Kıral , 2007 Süt (Milk) – Semih Kaplanoğlu (actor & assistant), 2006 Yumurta (Egg) – Semih Kaplanoğlu (actor), 2004 Meleğin Düşüşü (Angel's Fall) – Semih Kaplanoğlu.

EGG /AWARDS

INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

Bangkok World Film Festival - Best Director

Sevilla Film Festival - Eurimages Award

Estoril European Film Festival – 2nd Best Film

Eurasia International Film Festival - NETPAC Best Asian Film

13. Saraybosna Uluslararası Film Festival – The Best Actress

Valdivia Uluslararası Film Festival >>>

- Best Director (Semih Kaplanoğlu)

- Best Actress (Saadet İşıl Aksoy)

Fajr Film Festival

- Best Director

- Technical & Artistic Achievement

Nurnberg Turk- Alman Film Festival

- Best Film

- Best Actor (Nejat İşler)

27. Uluslararası İstanbul Film Festival

- Golden Tulip for Best Film

Ravenna Mosaico d'Europa Film Festival - Best Film

Seul Uluslararası Film Festival

- Best Film

Romanya Anonimul Film Festival

- Best Photography

14. Medfilm Festival

- Eurimages Italia Award

NATIONAL AWARDS

40. SİYAD AWARDS

Best Film

Best Director

Best Screenplay

Best Actor

Best Actress

Best Director of Photography

Best Art Director

Best Editing

44. Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival

Best Film

Best Screenplay

Best Director of Photography

Best Art Director

Best Costume

Yeşilçam Awards

Digiturk Young Talent Award - Saadet İşıl Aksoy

MILK /AWARDS

INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

3. Granada Cines del Sur Film Festival – Best Actor
International Istanbul Film Festival - FIPRESCI
International Istanbul Film Festival - Radikal People's Award

HONEY /AWARDS

INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

60. International Berlin Film Festival – The Golden Bear